



Morning Alert - Thursday, April 6, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

Most networks gave top play to reports on North Korea's launch of a mid-range ballistic missile on Wednesday and the upcoming U.S.-China summit in Washington. NTV led with a report on the warm weather across Japan on Wednesday.

Top stories in national dailies included the suspected use of chemical weapons in the attack in Syria (Asahi); a UN Security Council meeting on the Assad regime's alleged use of chemical weapons against rebels (Yomiuri); North Korea's missile launch (Sankei); the third-longest postwar recovery of the Japanese economy (Nikkei); and Tokyo Olympics facilities' failure to meet barrier-free guidelines (Mainichi).

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump, PM Abe hold teleconference on North Korea

NHK reported this morning that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe spoke by phone this morning in the wake of the ballistic missile launch by the DPRK on Wednesday. Abe told reporters after the teleconference: "I just spoke with President Trump for about 35 minutes. We were able to hold an in-depth exchange of views. We agreed that yesterday's ballistic missile launch by North Korea was a dangerous provocative act and a grave threat to Japan's security. The U.S.-China summit will start tomorrow, so I told the President that Japan is paying attention to how China will respond to the North Korean issue. President Trump stated emphatically that all options are on the

table. We will continue to work closely with the international community, including the U.S., to strengthen our response toward North Korea.”

U.S., Japanese officials confirm close coordination against North Korea

Most papers wrote that Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Council Secretariat spoke by phone with National Security Adviser McMaster in response to North Korea’s launch of a ballistic missile on Wednesday morning, during which they agreed that the two nations will continue to closely coordinate their responses to the DPRK. Nikkei added that MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Kanasugi and Special Representative for North Korea Policy Joseph Yun spoke by phone and confirmed close coordination between Washington and Tokyo.

The papers speculated that North Korea’s aim in launching a missile yesterday was to demonstrate its missile development capabilities ahead of the U.S.-China summit scheduled for April 6. Assessing that the projectile was a medium-range missile using solid fuel, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea are stepping up their vigilance because the use of solid fuel instead of liquid propellant can shorten the time for preparations to fire a missile and make it more difficult for other nations to detect signs of the launch in advance. Yomiuri wrote that an unnamed White House official told reporters on Tuesday that President Trump plans to discuss North Korea with Chinese President Xi during his visit to Florida on April 6-7 and urge Beijing to cooperate in implementing UN sanctions on Pyongyang. Mainichi wrote that it remains to be seen whether the two leaders will be able to achieve any concrete results in their dialogue because although President Trump will probably call on the Chinese leader to apply additional pressure on the DPRK, Xi will likely stress the need for dialogue with Pyongyang.

Mount Fuji Dialogue offers plan to bolster U.S.-Japan alliance

Nikkei wrote that the Mount Fuji Dialogue, an experts’ group cosponsored by the Japan Center for Economic Research and the Japan Institute of International Affairs, released on Wednesday a set of proposals on the U.S.-Japan alliance that is titled “Toward a Greater Alliance.” The group urged the U.S., Japan, and South Korea to enhance their security cooperation and make progress on missile defense in light of North Korea’s continued nuclear weapons development and ballistic missile tests. The report also stated that Tokyo and Seoul should work harder to improve their relations in preparation for the change of government in South Korea and honor the 2015 agreement on comfort women. The proposal also stated that Japan should enhance the capabilities of its coast guard and the Maritime Self Defense Force in order to support the United States’ freedom of navigation operations. The group also proposed that Japan expand logistical support for the U.S. Marine Corps and conduct joint exercises with the U.S., Australia, and India by stationing SDF troops on U.S. military bases on Guam.

On the economic front, the group proposed that Japanese steel and energy companies cooperate with the U.S. The report also advised the U.S. against leaving the TPP. The group plans to submit the proposal to the U.S. and Japanese governments in the near future.

Asahi also reported on the proposal, saying that the group expressed strong concern about President Trump for bringing uncertainty to the post-Cold War international order.

Trump administration considers implementing stricter border control for foreign tourists

Wednesday evening's Mainichi wrote that The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday that the Trump administration is discussing the idea of requiring foreigners entering the U.S. to provide their cellphone contacts and social media passwords upon arrival. The proposed plan may apply to travelers from Japan and European countries. In order to combat terrorism, the administration is reviewing border control in the United States, and the changes to be made might apply to visitors from the 38 countries that participate in the visa waiver program.

Ivanka Trump attends cherry blossom reception hosted by Japanese ambassador

Wednesday evening's Mainichi wrote that President Trump's daughter Ivanka attended a reception celebrating the cherry blossoms that was held on Tuesday at the Japanese Ambassador's Residence in Washington. The paper speculated that she participated in the reception to give consideration to Japan ahead of Chinese President Xi's visit to Florida on April 6-7 because Tokyo is engaged in disputes with Beijing over its activities in the East China Sea. According to the paper, Secretary of Commerce Ross also attended the event. Most papers also reported this morning on her participation in the event.

South Korean leadership reluctant to meet with Japanese envoy

Yomiuri wrote that the ROK government has decided not to accommodate Japan's request for Seoul to arrange a meeting between the Japanese ambassador and Acting President Hwang. An ROK government source was quoted as saying that Tokyo's request was unilateral and it would be impossible from the viewpoint of diplomatic protocol to arrange a meeting between the acting president and a diplomatic mission chief. Mainichi ran a similar report, speculating that the ROK government is worried that the public would criticize it for being "weak-kneed" toward Tokyo if it accepted Japan's request.

EDUCATION

Japanese students' English proficiency remains far below government targets

Yomiuri front-paged an announcement by the Education Ministry on Wednesday of the results of its fiscal 2016 survey of the English proficiency of students at public junior high and high schools across Japan. The survey showed that the proportion of third-year junior high school students with English

skills equivalent to Grade 3 in the Eiken English proficiency test or higher dropped 0.5 percentage point from the previous year to 36.1%, well below the targeted level of 50%. The share of third-year high school students with skills equivalent to Grade Pre-2 in the Eiken test or higher rose 2.1 points to 36.4%, still short of the 50% target. The government set the goal of raising both proportions to 50% by fiscal 2017, which ends in March 2018.

